



EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



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Hammond Superfund cleanup nearly done

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HAMMOND | The last few tons of contaminated soil from a former north side chemical facility left the city for good this week.

As part of Superfund cleanup operations at the former Calumet Container site, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency began removing the first of some 20,000 cubic yards of dirt laced with toxic and carcinogenic substances in October.

As many as 75 trucks a day -- each holding at least 19 tons of the polluted topsoil -- left the 11-acre site just south of Wolf Lake on 136th Street at the Indiana-Illinois border. The topsoil was taken to a landfill near Traverse City, Mich.

The last truck left on schedule Thursday, completing the first phase of the \$1.7 million cleanup plan without a single accident, said Verneta Simon, EPA on-scene coordinator.

She said the city helped by putting up signs warning motorists of the increased truck traffic and keeping the roads clear during December's heavy snowfalls.

"Now we're at the next stage," Simon said.

When the EPA returns in January, crews will begin backfilling the huge hole left by the excavations with a mix of clean dirt, sand and clay to prepare the area for re-seeding with native plants in the spring.

An outside contractor will vacuum up thousands of gallons of a fluorescent green liquid found underground. The liquid contained high levels of lead, benzene and other toxic substances dumped on the property during 20 years of Calumet Container operations.

The company recycled barrels and drums for chemical, oil, steel and manufacturing clients.

During the holidays, the EPA will maintain 24-hour security at the site to protect snowmobiles and other recreational vehicles from falling into the excavation area, Simon said.

With the contaminated soil gone, now is a good time for the community to get involved with plans for the future of the site, she said.

Last week, the EPA approved another \$500,000 for remediating the once and future wetland area, and Simon said that with public support, the formerly toxic property can be made into 11 acres of something good.

"Neighbors are our eyes and ears," she said. "It defeats the purpose to clean everything up, and then have fly-dumpers come back leaving garbage there."

[EXTRAS]

HOW TO HELP

Individuals and organizations interested in assuring a natural future for the former Calumet Container site are asked to contact Thomas Bloom at the EPA. Call him at (312) 886-1967 or e-mail bloom.thomas@epa.gov.